

## took a wrong turn and i just kept going by MaryPSue

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**Summary:**

*The kid has a shaved head and enormous eyes. She flinches at loud noises and sudden movements, and eats like she's starving. She doesn't talk.*

*Something's obviously wrong.*

*But when Benny Hammond picks up the phone, this time, he doesn't call some agency out of the city that he found in the phone book.*

*He calls a friend.*

...

or, the one where Benny lives and he and Hopper end up adopting El together. And also dating.

## took a wrong turn and i just kept going

### Author's Note:

So I'm still plugging away at my longfics. But I saw a tumblr post about 'Benny lives, and he and Hopper date and adopt Eleven' and then couldn't find anything on AO3 that matched the specific scenario I had in my head, so...this happened. Is it Anything? I don't know! Is it as complete as it's going to get, and here on AO3 for your perusal? Hell yeah it is.

I do think that in his own mental narration, Hopper would refer to himself by his first name – it's in the answering machine message that he clearly came up with himself and the Jim Croce song, so he does seem to identify with it even if everybody who knows him only calls him by his last name – but man oh man it is kind of weird to write an entire fic that way. So, uh, if it's also weird to read, sorry, I guess, but now you at least know my rationale.

Title's from Bruce Springsteen's 'Hungry Heart' because I fucking love Bruce Springsteen.

This is how it happens:

Hawkins, Indiana feels like a small town, sometimes. The kind of one-horse town where everybody knows everybody's business. But it's not, really, when you get right down to it, all *that* small. At the very least, it's definitely big enough to hold a few secrets.

The kid has a shaved head and enormous eyes. She flinches at loud noises and sudden movements, and eats like she's starving. She doesn't talk.

Something's obviously wrong.

But when Benny Hammond picks up the phone, this time, he doesn't call some agency out of the city that he found in the phone book.

He calls a friend.

...

The kid's about Will Byers' age. And there, the similarities end.

"I don't know what to do about her," Benny says, watching her tuck into an industrial-sized tub of rocky road like she hasn't eaten in a week. "She won't tell me anything about her folks. Seems real scared of wherever she came from."

"So you call Child Services," Jim Hopper says, rather than admit he doesn't know what to do about the kid either. "Instead of dragging me out here in the middle of the goddamn night."

"Still no sign of the Byers kid, huh?" Benny asks, too perceptive as always, and Jim huffs out a long breath, scrubbing a hand down his face.

"Not a candy-bar wrapper. Kid can't just disappear into thin air, right?"

"Well, apparently a kid can just appear *out* of it."

They both consider the kid sitting on Benny's counter, swimming in one of Benny's t-shirts, for a moment. The kid raises her head and considers them back, with a cool, wary stare that looks older than her cherubic face. Then, obviously deciding neither of them is a threat, she puts her head down and tucks back into the ice cream.

That head snaps back up, though, when there's a knock on the door.

"Who the heck..." Benny sighs, pushing himself up. The kid's darting scared glances between him and the door, ice cream forgotten, and Benny gives her that warm, reassuring smile of his. "Hey, it's okay. Whoever that is, I'll just tell 'em to go away. All right?"

"Benny," Jim says, holding out a hand to stop him. "Does anybody

else know the kid is here?"

Benny frowns at him. But he doesn't take another step toward the door. "What? What're you thinking?"

Jim glances over at the kid, who's still staring in the direction of the door with wide, frightened eyes. "I'm thinking, somebody just *turning up* right now is one coincidence too many." He gets to his feet, settling a hand on his belt where his gun's holstered. "Lemme get it."

Benny gives him a look like he's seeing Jim for the first time. But after a second, he says, "...sure," and settles uneasily back against the counter beside the kid, where he's got a clear line of sight to the diner's front door.

...

The thing is, Hawkins is a small town, by city standards. Sure *feels* like a small town, sometimes, with everybody's noses in everybody's business.

Things get around. The juicier, the better.

The thing is, Jim Hopper's managed to acquire himself something of a *reputation*, post-divorce. A date says this, a one-night stand says that, and before you can say 'rumour', the whole town knows the chief of police is a notorious tomcat. That he'll go after anything in a skirt.

It's annoying. But it's also useful. Because if everybody knows he's making it with any woman who'll have him, nobody's paying much attention to see where *else* his eye might wander.

There are words for the kind of guy he is, Jim knows. Most of them not all that complimentary. But he's never seen the need to put too fine a point on it. There was Joyce, and then there was the draft, and then there was Diane, and then everything fell the fuck apart and now *none* of it matters anymore. He's never really had a chance for

this, this – *curiosity* to be anything other than theoretical.

Or maybe he's just always been too much of a coward to look too hard at it. Though maybe that's for the best. These days, the longer Jim looks at himself, the less he likes what he sees.

So, if pressed, he wouldn't admit to feeling any type of way about Benny Hammond. Probably wouldn't even call the guy a friend. One misguided spill-your-guts session over a miserable late-night burger does not a friendship make.

But you don't have to be in *love* with a guy not to want to see him bleed out from gunshot wounds on the floor of his own diner.

That's just common sense.

...

Whoever the goons were who came to Benny's door, they're definitely not from Child Services.

Jim's embarrassed to admit that, for all his caution, he hadn't expected their *numbers*. Hadn't expected them to surround the place.

He's embarrassed to admit that none of them would've made it out of there if it hadn't been for the kid.

The kid's watching them both now, from the shitty dustcloth-covered couch in the shitty old cabin that nobody's used in probably something like a century. It'd seemed like a safer bet for hiding a fugitive *psychic* than the trailer on the lake. If those thugs back at the diner had tapped either Jim's phone or Benny's, then they've got their hooks into this town but deep.

Which means nowhere is safe and there's nobody they can trust.

"You know, I used to think you were a little paranoid," Benny says, conversationally, to Jim, without taking his eyes off the kid.

“I was. I am. That’s why I’m still alive.”

The kid’s big eyes flick back and forth between Jim and Benny.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Benny says, sitting down beside her, with that disarming gentleness he’s got. “Those people aren’t going to find you here. We’re gonna keep you safe.”

“Kinda looked like it was more *her* keeping *us* safe,” Jim mutters, before asking the kid, “Who were they?”

“Bad men.”

“She talks!” Benny says, beaming, and the kid gives him a wary glare, shifting away a little along the couch. “No, hey, it’s okay. Do you know where the bad men came from? I guess it’s kind of obvious why they were after you...”

The kid blinks at him like she’s forgotten how she’d knocked three grown men cold with just her mind.

They don’t get much more out of her that night. It’s not ten minutes after she IDs their assailants as ‘bad men’ that she’s curled up against the arm of the couch, out for the count, her little face furrowed up in a frown. Apparently the evening’s excitement took a little too much out of her.

That t-shirt looks chilly. Somewhere in this place, in these piles and piles of boxes of shit Jim never wanted to see again, there’s gotta be a blanket. He starts shuffling through stacks of boxes.

“Hey.”

Jim looks up from the box marked ‘Kitchen Supplies’ that he’s putting aside. Benny pulls the next box from the stack and flips it open. “What’re you looking for?”

“Blankets.”

Benny pauses, a revelatory expression crossing his face, there and gone. “Yeah. Guess we’re not going anywhere else tonight, huh?”

“Hope not.” Jim pulls the bottom box up and onto the end table and starts to rummage through it, for something to look at that isn’t Benny Hammond’s face. Or his bare forearms. Or any other part of him. “If those guys show up again, though -”

“Hey. Hop.” There’s no getting around it, this time. Jim looks up, directly into Benny’s blindingly sincere gaze. “Thanks. I know this was – a little more than you bargained for.”

Jim can’t bite back a huff of a laugh. “Just a little.”

Damn it all, Benny’s got a *great* smile.

“How long d’you think we’re gonna have to stick around out here?” Benny asks, that smile fading as he turns back to his box. “I don’t wanna be underfoot -”

“Don’t even worry about it. This place hasn’t been used in ages. I’m gonna keep you and that kid safe, all right? That’s the priority.”

“I got a fishing trip planned with the guys -”

“Yeah, I think you’re gonna miss it.”

The blanket Jim was looking for is at the bottom of the box, under all the holiday-themed towels Diane had had her heart so set on, once upon a time. He pulls it out and somehow manages not to get stuck staring at it for too long. The kid’s gotta be cold. She needs it more than he does.

“That’s nice,” Benny comments, appreciatively, as Jim tucks the patchwork fabric around the kid’s shoulders. She doesn’t wake up, but she does ball her little hands up in the soft quilted fabric, snuggling down into it. The sleepy furrow in her forehead uncreases, just a little. “Somebody make that for you?”

“Not for me,” Jim says, and casts around for something to change the subject to. “Like I said, you can stay out here for a bit. Nobody knows about this place. And I’m thinking it might not be such a good idea to go home right now. There anything you need can’t be picked up at the store?”

“Wait, you’re not planning to *leave* us here,” Benny says, like this is an argument they’ve already had and settled. “They saw your face too, whoever’s looking for this girl knows you helped her -”

“Don’t worry about *me*,” Jim interrupts. Benny’s being a decent human being. That’s all. “You really think they’d try anything with the chief of police?”

There’s no hint of a smile in it when Benny says, “I don’t know *what* they’d do. I don’t even know who they *are*. All I know is they tried to kill me for feeding a hungry kid.”

“She’s not the only kid in trouble around here,” Jim reminds him. “Look, I appreciate the concern. But I still got a job to do. And maybe I can find out a little more about what the hell is going on while I’m at it. You don’t *mind*, do you? Sticking around, looking out for her, keeping out of trouble...?”

“You kidding?” Benny looks around the cabin’s big main room. “If the other option’s a bullet in the head, this place is the Taj Mahal.” The joking note in his voice gets abruptly serious again, though, as he turns back to Jim. “Guess I can’t really stop you, if you’re set on going back. But – watch yourself, Hop.”

Jim doesn’t trust himself to reply to that. He nods, instead.

...

He doesn’t get much sleep that night.

...

The kid’s still asleep when Jim leaves, early the next morning. Must’ve really been wiped.



Benny's up, though, and rifling through the set of shelves that passes for a pantry. "So long as none of this stuff's gone off, we should be okay for a couple days," he muses, to the dusty rows of cans. "But we'll end up hating every minute of it. Can I give you a shopping list?"

Jim takes it down in his notepad, and leaves a note of his own. "That's the code," he says, tapping the string of dots and dashes with the end of his pen. "That'll be my knock, when I get back. Don't open the door for anybody else. If they didn't find us last night, they probably won't once I get the truck outta here, but there's always a chance -"

"Stay paranoid, stay alive," Benny interrupts. "Yeah, I got it." He gives his head a shake, looking over at the kid on the couch like he can't believe his eyes. "Jesus, this is so surreal. I keep expecting to wake up."

"You and me both," Jim mutters. "Remember. Don't answer the door."

It's not an obscenely long drive back into town, but Jim adds on some miles switching back, doubling back on himself, taking the scenic route. He doesn't actually see any other vehicles until he hits the town limits, but – like Benny so pithily put it. *Stay paranoid. Stay alive.*

"I know, I know," Jim grumbles, as he pushes through the station door, not bothering to stop to hang up his coat and hat. He's got a feeling he'll be heading right back out again, anyway. "Spare me the lecture, Flo. It's already been a hell of a morning."

"That's not -" Flo calls after him, but Jim's already pushing open the door to his office. "Chief, there's -"

The man standing in Jim's office looks back over his shoulder at the sound of the door opening, and smiles.

It's a friendly smile. A little fatherly, a little indulgent, like it knows exactly what schoolboy mischief Jim's been getting into and is letting him get away with it with a wink. The man the smile belongs to is

the very picture of authority, from the sweep of his silvery hair to the tips of his shiny leather shoes. Put together, the whole picture's giving Jim the very strong impression he's just been called into the principal's office.

He stuffs it down. It's *his* office, dammit.

"Can I help you?" he asks, with as much outright hostility as he thinks he can get away with.

That smile just gets wider.

"Chief Hopper?" the man asks, turning to offer his hand to shake. The other stays in the pocket of his expensively-cut pants. It feels kind of like an insult. "I think you can. Dr. Martin Brenner."

Jim looks at the man's – the *doctor's* – proffered hand for a second. He doesn't take it. "So what brings you to my office this early in the morning, doc?"

The man – Brenner – nods his head towards something behind Jim. "Shut the door."

He sounds like somebody who's used to having his orders followed. Jim pulls the door to only grudgingly.

He'll give *Doctor* Brenner this: the man gets to the point. The latch has barely clicked before Brenner says, "I can help you find Will Byers."

That...is not what Jim was expecting. He blinks a little, trying to get his train of thought to switch tracks. "Really? What – do you have... information, or -"

"Something like that." The smile slips away, replaced with thoughtful seriousness. "Without my help, you won't close this case."

"Look. I don't care how you know...whatever it is you know. We can probably get you some kind of deal, if it's immunity you want. Just help me get the kid back to his mother -"

"I do want a deal," Brenner says, all nice and reasonable. "But I don't

need immunity from prosecution. There's someone I'm looking for, as well. A girl. I think you've met her."

It's still all nice and reasonable. If he's noticed Jim's feeling like a bucket of ice water just got upended over his head, he gives absolutely no sign. "I don't want to see anyone get hurt. I only want these children safely back home where they belong. And I have every reason to believe you can help me."

Jim's mouth has gone dry.

"If you know something," he manages, at last, trying to pull his thoughts together. "About Will Byers. If you have information, and you withhold it -"

"That's a criminal offense," Brenner finishes for him, looking and sounding entirely unconcerned. "I know."

It slips out before Jim can stop it. "Who the hell are you."

For the first time, he thinks he sees a flicker of genuine emotion cross the doctor's face. And there is *nothing* Jim likes about it.

"Just a concerned papa," Brenner says, with a quick flash of that friendly smile. "Think about it. But don't think *too* long. Joyce Byers has suffered enough already, don't you agree?"

He doesn't even say goodbye. Just steps around Jim like Jim's not even there and walks out of the office, across the bullpen, totally unruffled. Behind him, Jim can hear the man wishing Flo a good morning before he leaves.

It takes Jim far too long to realise his hands are in fists.

...

It takes much longer – and a lot more doubling back – to get back to the cabin than it had to get into town. Jim doesn't know for sure if

anybody's following him, whether he's being watched, but – anybody who can bargain with the life and safety of a missing kid is probably cold-blooded enough to do what he can to avoid having to actually make the bargain at all.

He wouldn't admit it to anyone, but Jim's still a little rattled by the time he knocks on the cabin door. He's parked the truck in the woods, maybe a mile away, probably a little less, and walked up. Abundance of caution. *Stay paranoid, stay alive.*

Something smells *incredible* when Benny swings the door open. "Something smells incredible," Jim says, handing over one of the bags of groceries so he can pull off his hat as he steps inside.

"You think?" Benny shuts the door behind Jim and, Jim notices appreciatively, locks it behind him. "There wasn't much else to do, so...me and the kid been inventing some dinner. Since I couldn't open up the diner..."

A twinge of guilt flashes through Jim, and then collides with another twinge of guilt going the other direction when the kid looks up from the folding card table, where she's stirring something in a bowl, and gives him the briefest flicker of a shy smile.

"You found her some clothes," Jim says. It sounds a little strangled to his own ears.

Benny shrugs. "We had time on our hands and a whole bunch of boxes. Hope that was okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, it's – not like anybody else was using 'em." Jim makes himself take a breath. "Anybody come by while I was gone?"

Benny gives his head a shake. "All quiet on the western front. Right, El?"

The kid gives him the most serious thumbs up Jim's ever seen. Like she's concentrating hard on getting it right.

"Taught her that," Benny says, beaming. "Can you believe she'd never heard of a thumbs up?"

Unfortunately, Jim thinks he can. “‘El’?” he asks, instead.

“It’s short,” the kid pipes up.

“For *Eleven*,” Benny says. The grimness doesn’t suit him. He lowers his voice as he adds, for Jim’s benefit, “She’s got this tattoo, of the number. Says it’s her *name*.” The look he shoots Jim is pure *I don’t like this*. But he doesn’t elaborate, just beams at the kid again. “So I figured she could use a nickname.”

“Like Benny,” the kid agrees, with a nod. “Like Hop.”

“You’re feeling talkative today,” Jim says. “El.”

The kid gives him a challenging look, then focuses all her attention back on her bowl.

Dinner tastes as good as it smells, which is a minor miracle considering most of it came out of a can. They make a weirdly domestic picture, Jim thinks, clustered around the tiny table with their meals, talking about what they did all day. Thumbs up isn’t the only thing Benny’s taught the kid, and once she gets over the wary shyness she’s been aiming at Jim for some reason, she seems only too glad to show off. She acts as proud of her spitty, sputtery attempts to whistle with two fingers in her mouth as if she’d just singlehandedly scored the winning touchdown in overtime. It’s frustratingly adorable, and almost enough to make Jim forget about that morning.

Almost.

Once they finish cleaning up from dinner, Benny has the bright idea to show the kid – El – how to play Go Fish, which ends up carrying them right to bedtime. El doesn’t ever quite relax, stealing glances at the door all evening like she expects somebody to come bursting through it, but those glances get fewer and farther between as the game goes on. By the time she starts yawning like the top of her head’s going to fall off, there’s a real-looking smile making itself at home on her face.

Jim can’t look at it without a sharp stab of guilt.

This time, they make up an actual bed for El, in the little room off the

cabin's main one. Jim tucks her in under the quilt his mother'd made for Sara the first time she'd had to go in for chemo, and doesn't know what he's thinking. Doesn't know what he's *feeling*. All he knows is, in the end, he can't look the kid in the eye.

"Go to sleep," he whispers, and somehow resists the ingrained impulse to press a kiss to the top of El's fuzzy head. It's been so long. He'd never have expected *that* instinct to come back so strongly, so fast.

But he can't. She's not *his*.

El nods, and pulls the blankets up around her chin, shutting her eyes. Jim slips out of the room and shuts the door as quietly as he can.

Benny's settled himself on the couch, with one of the beers Jim had judiciously added to his shopping list. When Jim collapses onto the couch beside him, he nods, and passes over another beer. Jim takes it, cracks it, and drains half of it gratefully.

"Long day, huh," Benny says sympathetically, and again it's so weirdly fucking domestic that Jim has to swallow down a snort of laughter. Nothing about this is funny.

"Yeah." He turns the beer can around in his hands, once, twice, three times. "Yeah, really was."

"You're telling me. I can't say I know all that much about kids, but man, this one..." Benny gives his head a shake. "Can't complain too much about getting stuck out here. Whatever she's been through, whatever they *did* to her – I'd never be able to forgive myself now if I got her taken back."

Thankfully, he doesn't seem to find anything unusual about Jim's silence. "You find anything more out about her? Where she came from?"

Jim takes another long pull from his beer as he tries to decide how to answer that.

"Yeah," he says, after a moment. "I think so. Little bit."

“So?” God dammit, Benny actually sounds *eager*.

“Went by the library,” Jim says. “Found some old newspaper articles. This woman, Terry Ives, she sued the government for stealing her baby. Kid would be about twelve years old, now.” He doesn’t mention *how* he’d found those articles. That he’d been looking for Dr. Martin Brenner’s name. He’s got a feeling that’s something he’s gonna want to keep under his hat. Just for now. “She was all mixed up in some kind of experiments while she was pregnant. Something to do with ‘unlocking the hidden potential of the human mind’ or some shit. Drugs. Psychic spying.”

“You mean like...” Benny waves a hand in the direction of his head. “That spooky shit El can do?”

“Sounds like.”

Benny blows out a long breath, leaning forward against his knees as he studies the wall like it’s fascinating. “So that’s what we’re up against, here. The *government*.”

Jim takes another swig of his beer. “Sounds like.”

Benny doesn’t seem to have anything to say to that. Jim can’t blame him. There really isn’t anything *to* say to that.

“Any luck with the Byers kid?” Benny asks, at last, and Jim shakes his head.

“Joyce is swearing blind he called her up, said nothing, and hung up. Said she recognised his *breathing*.”

Benny raises both eyebrows. But all he says is, “Well, they say not to knock mothers’ intuition.”

They drink in surprisingly comfortable silence for a while before he says, “I’m guessing you showing back up here alive means you didn’t run into any – trouble, in town.”

Jim chokes a little on a mouthful of beer.

“Nothing I couldn’t handle,” he says, after a second or two of frantic

deliberation. "Think I shook a tail on the way out of town, but I parked a ways away and walked up, just to be sure. And I swung by the diner before I left."

"They're watching it?" Benny asks his beer, gloomily, like he already knows the answer.

"Looks like."

Benny nods, solemnly.

"Guess we're toughing it out here for a while, then," he says, a few breaths later. "What a mess."

"Can say that again."

"I will say, though," Benny goes on, still talking to his beer. "If I had to turn fugitive because of some messed-up *Escape to Witch Mountain* shit, guess I'm just lucky it was with you."

Everything that's on the tip of Jim's tongue to say, about how it was him who was *lucky* he had somewhere to take Benny and the kid and that neither of them are idiots who'd take stupid risks for stupid reasons, that he would've done the same for anybody in Benny's position, all dries up and withers away when Benny reaches out without looking and puts a hand, real casual, on Jim's knee.

Jim can't move.

It's just – it's just, a friendly gesture. That's all. A weird attempt at comfort. They're just a couple of guys, having a couple of beers, trying to pretend neither of them are wanted men and neither of them has an ultimatum dangling over his head –

He should probably breathe sometime soon.

Benny's got big hands. Warm hands.

Jim's nowhere near drunk enough for this.

His frozen silence is probably what makes Benny look over, and then pull his hand back very carefully. "Sorry," he says, aiming for a



chuckle and not quite making it there. “Guess I’ve been, uh, reading you wrong -”

“No.”

The word’s out before Jim can snatch it back, stuff it down. But it’s too late now. Just like with the kid, now he’s in it to his neck, and the only way out is through.

Still, he has to clear his throat before he can force any more words out. “No, you didn’t – read me wrong. I just -”

He finally plucks up enough wretched courage to look Benny in the eye.

Thankfully, Benny throws him a lifeline. “Oh, good. ‘cause I was gonna feel like a real asshole if we were basically trapped here together and I came on to you and you didn’t -”

“No. I do. I definitely – how do we do this?”

“Just like this,” Benny says, and then leans across the couch and kisses him.

It’s not exactly tonsil hockey, right out the gate. But it’s not exactly tame, either. Benny just kisses like a guy who knows what the hell he’s doing. Takes his time. Like he’s enjoying himself.

The angle’s not what Jim’s used to. Or the *beard*. But other than that – it’s just kissing. Just a nice, deep, *enthusiastic* kiss.

He honestly can’t remember what he was so scared of.

It’s forever and no time at all before Benny pulls back, watching Jim carefully. “Still good?”

“Better than good,” Jim says, honestly. “We’re doing that again.”

Benny turns on that gorgeous smile like a light. “Well, if you say so.”

...

There's still a white panel van with a blue logo parked across the street from the diner, when Jim rolls past on his way to work the next morning. Maybe a little *too* conspicuously parked. He doesn't actually know where Benny lives, but he'd put money on there being another panel van parked somewhere in sight of it, too.

Whoever Brenner's working for now, government or not, they're not easing up.

Jim chews on the thought as he turns toward the station. He's not sure how much of this surveillance is really intended to find the kid, and how much is just a show for his benefit. In the end, it doesn't really matter. Benny can't go back to living his life. Not so long as the kid's around.

Maybe not even then. Jim hasn't forgotten how that blonde bitch had tried to shoot him in the back.

That's the thing, really. Jim doesn't know these people. Doesn't know, not for sure, what he's dealing with. The level of take-no-prisoners ruthlessness on display at the diner and the mercenary civility of Brenner turning up in his office don't seem to go together. Jim doesn't know where he stands. If he knew they were just going to kill him and Benny anyway – and that's sure what the scene at the diner suggests – then there's no point trying to make a deal. But if they're just going to kill him anyway, then it doesn't make sense that they'd even *offer* the deal. Make more sense just to wait for him at the station, follow him back to the cabin, then slaughter everybody and take the kid. But Jim's not sure anybody's even *tried* to tail him.

And then there's Will Byers, and however *he* fits into all of this...

It doesn't add up. It just *doesn't*.

And it's put Jim in an impossible position. The kid's relying on him. *Trusting* him. And so is Benny. But they can't hide forever.

Jim doesn't want to think about it. But he's got no choice. The plain

fact is, he might only be able to protect one of them.

And he couldn't say, if he got asked right now, which one he'd choose.

Flo gives Jim a suspicious look when he stops at her desk instead of going straight through to his office. "I guarantee nobody's waiting in there to ambush you today," she says, looking over the top of her glasses at him.

"Yeah, no – that guy who was here yesterday. Brenner."

"What about him?"

Jim only hesitates a moment. "He leave a number? Some way to get in touch?"

Flo's look gets more suspicious. But she doesn't say anything, just pushes her glasses up her nose with a jangle of chains and starts flipping through her Rolodex.

And a handful of minutes later, when Jim heads out to check up on Joyce Byers, he's got Martin Brenner's card burning a hole in his jacket pocket.

Just in case.

### **Author's Note:**

Acquaintances to old married husbands speedrun go.

Technically Hawkins *is* a city. It says so on the outside of the police station and everything. And speaking as somebody who knows: thirty thousand people is not a small town. Even if it can feel like one sometimes.

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